

'They lied, Rosli Dhoby not pro-Indonesia'

Winston Way

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Documentary evidence showed that British Colonial Office hid truth of how and why Charles Vyner Brooke was assassinated.

The re-emergence of an old incriminating BBC report of famed Sarawak Malay nationalist Rosli Dhoby has irked his family.

Tahar Johnny, a cousin of Rosli, known for his role in the assassination of Sir Duncan Stewart, the second governor for Sarawak, said the later was not pro-Indonesia although he was anti-British.

"Yes, he had a great liking for anything Indonesia. Early in the mornings, he would listen to Indonesian radio broadcasts, and he also liked to read Indonesia books.

"But that was it. He had never mentioned anything about supporting Indonesia to govern Sarawak," said Tahar, 73 adding that the incident had happened a long time ago and it was not right to kindle "old wounds" especially now that "Sarawak is already peaceful and a better place for its people."

Rosli was reportedly part of the anti-cessionist movement which was against Rajah Charles Vyner Brooke's decision to cede the state to the British Crown just after the Second World War.

Rosli, together with his anti-cessionist Rukun Tiga Belas organisation members – Awang Rambli Amit, Morshidi Sidek and Bujang Suntong – had conspired carried out the assassination of Stewart during the governor's first official visit to Sibu on December 3, 1949.

Rosli stabbed Stewart on his arrival after Morshidi pretended to take pictures of the governor.

The four were subsequently sentenced to death, and were hanged to death on March 2, 1950. Rosli was at the time a 17-year-old lad.

Speaking to FMT, Tahar however admitted to the possibility that there were other conspirators who were sympathizers of the then newly independent and expansion-aspiring Indonesia.

"Some of them (the other members of Rukun Tiga Belas) might have been pro-Indonesia. But I am very sure Rosli wasn't.

"He indeed had a great admiration for Indonesia, and most likely gained his nationalist sentiments from Indonesia, but he had never mentioned about supporting a union with Indonesia," he said.

Letter between conspirators

Tahar said further that Rosli had never expressed any aspirations to involve Indonesia in the future of Sarawak.

He was responding to a report by the BBC Radio last year, alleging that a letter between two unnamed fellow conspirators of Rosli had been found, within which they made clear their intentions to help Indonesia to take over British Sarawak.

The existence of the alleged letter, however, was suppressed by the British, amidst fear of hostile reaction from Indonesia. SouthEast Asia was in the midst of pre-war fears.

The British then purportedly linked the assassination to Anthony Brooke, Vyner's nephew, who was at that time also against Sarawak becoming a crown colony.

In the BBC report dated March 12, 2012, it said former undisclosed documents proved British officials had covered up evidence about Stewart's assassination, fearing the truth might start a war.

This however, was said to have stained the reputation of Anthony Brooke, who was the "Rajah Muda" or "Crown Prince" for the Sarawak.

Rosli and Morshidi were thought to be members of a group dedicated to restoring Anthony to the throne of Sarawak.

Anthony was never officially informed that the assassination had no connections with him until he died in 2011.

Prior to Sarawak becoming a crown colony, it was ruled by the Brooke Family for more than 100 years.

However, in July 1946, Sarawak became Britain's last colonial possession, when it was handed over to the British by Vyner, in exchange for a £200,000 much to Anthony's and most Sarawakians' chagrin.

Indonesia's eye on Sarawak

Many anti-cession protests were held by the Sarawak people, calling for a return to the Brookes' rule under Anthony.

When Stewart was killed, suspicions as expected fell on him, alleging him as the leader and center of the anti-cession movement.

The BBC report quoted historian Professor Simon Ball of Glasgow University, of saying that the British had never actually believed Anthony was of any part to assassinate Stewart.

Ball, who had comprehensively researched the assassination case, said evidence showed the ringleaders of the assassination were not acting for Anthony, nor did they have any intention of returning him to power.

Ball had discovered a letter to this effect.

According to Ball, the letter was written by one co-conspirator to the other and in it the correspondents made clear of their objectives of assisting Indonesia to take over Sarawak.

"What they want is freedom as part of Indonesia. So this is the underlying political motive for the killing. It's not to support (Anthony) Brooke," Ball was quoted by BBC Radio.

The letter said the British was worried about confronting Indonesia with these new allegations especially since it was already having to manage insurgency in Malaya.

"So they decided to keep quiet about the fact that this had little to do with Brooke's supporters and a lot to do with an anti-colonial independence movement, " added Ball.

He said in the letter marked 'confidential', John Higham of the Colonial Office wrote to a colleague in the Foreign Office stating: 'We have now come to the very definite conclusion that the publication of the correspondence would be dangerous and that it would be undesirable to show it to Anthony Brooke'"

It also mentioned that "the Superintendent of the local Special Branch wrote two weeks later:
'There is no evidence or suspicion that AB [Anthony Brooke] knew of the intention to
assassinate H.E. [His Excellency] The Governor',"